



# JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

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## James Thomson — 1748-1948

In the summer of 1748 the author of *The Seasons* passed away. Thinking that there should be some recognition of this date, we wrote to A. D. McKillop (Rice) for help. With characteristic generosity, he immediately replied:

"Our editor has suggested that some comments on the present state of Thomson studies may be in order on the two hundredth anniversary of his death. Perhaps, too, Johnson's approval of Thomson may help to justify such a contribution to *JNL*. But no attempt will be made here to offer a current bibliography or to duplicate or anticipate reports of work in progress.

"There has long been a steady interest in Thomson, supported by considerable actual reading of *The Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence* (at least Canto I). Yet we have had little intensive study of the kind that has been given to Swift, Pope, and Johnson. In the last years of his life Professor John Edwin Wells published a series of valuable bibliographical articles on Thomson's poems, taking *The Seasons* both individually and collectively. His studies were largely based on his own fine Thomson collection, now in the Swarthmore College Library. Unfortunately Wells did not live to complete these studies; for the individual *Seasons* we have in print only his articles on *Spring* and *Autumn*, though I understand that he had completed *Winter* and was working on *Summer*. He would have been the ideal Thomson bibliographer.

"Thomson's life and literary career should now be reexamined in the light of our advancing knowledge of the period, helpful though Morel's big book and G. C. Macaulay's small one are. To this end a collected edition of his letters is needed. Professor Ralph M. Williams, who has made a beginning on the project and explored the possibilities, now writes, 'I wish someone else would do the job,

as Thomson's letters are badly scattered, and are, I think, worth collecting.' But I am reluctant to take this as a withdrawal. Collaboration and cooperation are evidently needed for this important editorial task.

"Zippel's variorum edition and J. Logie Robertson's convenient text (trustworthy, though not entirely complete for variant readings) make possible a full study of the successive versions of *The Seasons*, though this has not been carried out in print on a large scale. The chief difficulty is to keep all the aspects of Thomson's life and work in perspective — his manifold interests and his responses to ethics, popular religious thought, science, external nature, geography, history, fine arts, politics. Our portraits of the poet are after all partial portraits, from the rural describer of the 'dawn of romanticism' legend to the Shaftesburian benevolist of Moore's classic articles and the Newtonian rationalist more recently presented by Herbert Drennon in the important articles drawn from his Chicago thesis. In a study called *The Background of Thomson's Seasons* I undertook a portrayal of the poet's eclecticism in terms of the actual content of his work, particularly those parts for which sources could be found in current scientific and travel literature. Fairchild's sketch in Volume I of his *Religious Trends in English Poetry* is well balanced for the religious and intellectual influences. As far as we can speak of a central position, Shaftesburian benevolism seems to hold up pretty well, despite the strain to which recent scholarly interest in Newtonianism has subjected it. I take this to be approximately Miss Nicolson's position in her brilliant and highly readable *Newton Demands the Muse*, which throws new light on large tracts of *The Seasons*. She contrives to do justice both to the scientific ideas and the poetic art, and we are reminded that the intrinsic merit of Thomson's poetry should not be overlooked for the -isms.

"Several recent theses which students of Thomson should reckon with are unfortunately not available in full. The excellent quality of Horace E. Hamilton's *Travel and Science in Thomson's Seasons*, Yale 1941, is shown by two short articles (*MLN*, LXII [1947], 194-97; *ibid*, LXIII [1948], 46-48). Orville Francis Linck's *Benevolism in the Works of James Thomson*, recorded in *Summaries of Doctoral Dissertations...Northwestern University*, IX (1941), 23-28, makes a well grounded claim for the influence of Hutcheson. Eric S. Taylor's *James Thomson: Poet of Nature and Man*, Edinburgh 1943, is not known even by summary in this country,



but Mr. Taylor's letters indicate that he undertakes to formulate Thomson's religious and philosophical views by definite stages or periods. His fortunate rediscovery of the sale catalogue of Thomson's books provides new evidence which calls for extensive scrutiny. If other unpublished work on Thomson is not recorded here, I can only refer to Johnson's comment on his definition of *pastern*.

"Meanwhile, for workaday use, there is a fairly obvious need for an adequately though not oppressively annotated edition of *The Seasons* and *The Castle of Indolence*, much reprinted through these poems have been during the last two centuries. For the same period of time Thomson's *Liberty* has been studiously avoided; but even though Johnson frightens us off by announcing that he could not read the poem through, I would venture to urge its importance as a document."

### Thomson and Edinburgh University

Ernest Mossner (Texas) writes: "It has seldom been observed, I believe, that both James Thomson and David Hume were students at Edinburgh University at about the same time and consequently were exposed to much the same intellectual climate. My own studies in the early education of Hume have led me to alter considerably the received notions of the state of the university in the early eighteenth century. Suffice it to say here that the atmosphere at Edinburgh was fresh, healthful, stimulating, and extremely 'modern.' This intellectual climate stimulated the different natural bents of the two students. The Newtonian, Lockean, and Shaftesburian ideas imbibed by both Thomson and Hume as undergraduates can be traced in their later works: in the one, in discursive didactic poetry; in the other, in pellucid philosophical prose. In Thomson the ideas of science, psychology, and sentiment are reflected, as it were, in the mirror of his poetry. In Hume, they are transmuted by the chemistry of his metaphysics into an integrated system designed to revolutionize modern thought.

"A further parallel between the poet and the philosopher is suggested: they were both Scots and always remained loyal Scots. Though Hume wrote much of his philosophy in France, he has seldom been called a French philosopher. Yet because Thomson wrote much of his poetry in England, he is generally regarded as an English poet. This seems unfair to the university which nurtured his mind, as well as to the Scotland in which he was reared. Along

with many Scots after the Union, Thomson and Hume decided that they must renounce the vernacular for English as a literary language: but their affection for the mother country is not thereby to be impugned. The necessity of English was being stressed by the faculty of Edinburgh University in order to train Scottish statesmen and men of letters. Transplanted to London or to Paris, A Scot is a Scot for a' that!"

### Thomson and Delacour

Geoffrey Tillotson sends us the following valuable bibliographical note: "James Thomson's poem in commendation of the Irish poet James Delacour appeared in some of the later editions of his poem 'A Prospect of Poetry' (It is not printed in the first Dublin edition, 1734). Thomson's poem exists in two widely varying versions (and possibly in more than two). One version 'To the Reverend Author, in Ireland, on his Prospect of Poetry. By the Author of the Seasons' appeared in *A Prospect of Poetry: Addressed to the Right Honorable John, Earl of Coke and Orrery... The Fifth Edition*, Cork, 1770 (pp. 55-56). It opens with:

'Hail sweet tongued DE-LA-COUR, whose deep mouth'd fame,' and runs to 59 lines. The other version 'To Mr. James Delacour, in Ireland, on his Prospect of Poetry' appeared in *Poems by the Revd. James De-La-Cour*, Cork, 1778 (pp. 51-54). It opens with:

'Hail gently warbling DELACOUR whose fame,' and runs to 79 lines. It is signed at the end 'J. THOMSON. / Author of the SEASONS.'

"Copies of these three books are in the Widener Library. They are the only editions available to me at the moment. These editions all contain Delacour's poem 'To Mr. Thomson on his Seasons.'"

Can any of our readers supply further details connected with this important discovery?

### Thomsoniana

Orville F. Linck (Wayne Univ.) writes that he is planning a study of the psychology of sensibility based on the work of Thomson. The tentative title is *Such Tears Are Virtue*.

In a recent note from R. D. Havens (Johns Hopkins) he adds: "Thomson seems to me a much better poet than is generally realized, though Johnson said it admirably in his remark about the two candles."



In the *ELH* for June appears H. E. Hamilton's "James Thomson's 'Seasons': Shifts in the Treatment of Popular Subject Matter."

### The Pursuit of a Leaf

Henry Pettit (Univ. of Colo.) writes that he has been "following a leaf around, in the 18th century, beginning with Thomson's *Winter* (line 130) 'plays the withered leaf,' going to Crabbe's 'yon withered leaf' (*The Village*, Bk.I, line 212), to Coleridge's famed 'one red leaf, the last of its clan' in *Christobel*." He adds: "I know Thomson added *his* leaf after the first edition. My interest lies in the gradual transformation of this last leaf of autumn between Thomson and Coleridge and also in possible classical sources." Can any of you add further references or suggest earlier uses? Pettit ends with the remark: "This may be trivial stuff — especially for Dr. Johnson's crowd — but if he would withhold his thunder and lightening, he might be entertained by the pursuit of a dying leaf when he could not bear the tulip streaks. At least this is more like a ghost."

### Miscellaneous News Items

We are distressed to report the sudden death on March 23d of C. E. Burch, the Defoe scholar from Howard University. It was only recently from J. R. Moore that we learned the tragic news.

We welcome the second number of the *Seventeenth Century News Letter*, under the editorship of Arthur Coon (Sampson), packed with important news items and stimulating comments.

Jim Osborn sends word of the acquisition by the Bodleian of a large collection of manuscripts of John Locke, which may well prove important to many of our readers.

Jim Tobin has now become Vice President of the Declan McMullen Publishers in New York City.

Although it is completely outside our field, we might pass on the information that Ehrsam and Deily's *Bibliographies of Twelve Victorian Authors* can now be secured at the bargain price of \$1.15 from R. Deily, Univ. of Kentucky Library.

The May issue of the *Library of Congress Quarterly* (the Journal of Current Acquisitions) reports that the library has acquired a complete file of *The Spectator*, *The Freeholder*, *The Microscope*, as well as Swift and Defoe items.

All congratulations to Percy J. Dobell of Tunbridge Wells, whose

catalogue No. 100 has recently reached us! Dobell is a genuine scholar, as well as a superb bookseller, and his contributions to research have been many and varied.

Mrs. Lelon M. Winsborough (Texas Univ.) has recently completed a checklist of critical studies on the poet Young, which we hope someday to see in print.

We have been chuckling over a little nugget sent in by Clarence Tracy. One of his students on a recent final exam wrote that Dr. Johnson's favorite maxim was "Clear your mind of Kant."

### Augustan Reprint Society

With the successful completion of its first two years of existence, the Augustan Reprint Society announces its program for the third year (1948-49). Six regular issues will again be sent to subscribers, two each from three groups: Series IV, Men, Manners, and Critics; Series V, Drama; and Series VI, Poetry and Language. In Series IV, the selections will be from Sir John Falstaff's (pseud.), *The Theatre* (1720); Aaron Hill's Preface to *The Creation*, and Thomas Brereton's Preface to *Esther*; Ned Ward's Selected Tracts. In Series V there will be reprints selected from Nevil Payne's *Fatal Jealousy* (1673); Mrs. Centlivre's *The Busie Body* (1709); Edward Moore's *The Gamester* (1753 — much written about but hard to find for students); and Charles Macklin's *Man of the World* (1781). In Series VI, the reprints will be from John Oldmixon's *Reflections on Dr. Swift's Letter to Harley* (1712) and Arthur Mainwaring's *The British Academy* (1712); Pierre Nicole's *De Epigrammate*; and Andre Dacier's *Essay on Lyric Poetry*.

If you have not already subscribed to this stimulating and flourishing society — the cost (\$2.50 a year in the U.S.) is unbelievably low considering what you get — be sure to send in your check to one of the editors (E.N. Hooker or Tom Swedenberg at U.C.L.A. or Dick Boys at Michigan) at once.

### A New 18th Century Handbook

Everywhere teachers will welcome the appearance of A. D. McKillop's *English Literature from Dryden to Burns*, just published by Appleton-Century-Crofts. Together with George Sherburn's excellent survey (discussed in our last number), this 445 page book will be a valuable aid in courses in Restoration and 18th century English literature — as a judicious introduction to the



period, a commentary on major specific works, and a convenient help in research for undergraduate term papers.

What McKillop has efficiently done is to give succinct biographical sketches of the chief authors (along with short estimates of most of the minor writers); critical summaries of the principal movements and genres (political and social history, deism, primitivism, sentimentalism — the drama, novel, periodicals, etc.); separate discussions of about a dozen masterpieces; and brief up-to-date bibliographies designed to send students to more exhaustive reference works. The purpose, well expressed by the author, has been "to give the student some timely aid in the earlier stages of his acquaintance with the period by putting at his disposal something less elaborate than full-scale literary history and biography, something more highly developed than an elementary syllabus." Included also are a table of dates, maps of London, and 37 illustrations inserted in the text. An excellent index greatly increases the usefulness of the handbook.

All this leads ~~your~~ editor to one further observation. Now that we have a superb history of the period and an up-to-date, compact handbook, what teachers of undergraduate courses in the 18th century need most is a series of inexpensive texts of the work of the major authors, and by major we do not mean merely Dryden, Pope, Swift, Johnson. We need desperately a series of cheap paper-backed volumes containing selections from Dryden's criticism, Defoe's shorter works, the light verse of Gay and Prior, the critical essays of Addison and Steele (not merely the Sir Roger de Coverley papers), the descriptive verse of Thomson and Dyer — Goldsmith's essays, the prose works of Burke, Hume, etc., representative letters of Chesterfield, Walpole, Gray, Cowper, a volume of criticism on the fine arts, the best poems of Gray, Collins, Smart, Cowper, etc. — to name only the more obvious choices.

Unfortunately the sponsors of the cheap texts already on the market have not seen fit to include many 18th century texts, undoubtedly because they feared the sale would not be large. Consequently, we must all raise such a howl of demand that some enterprising publisher will take the risk. With proper reasonably-full texts available, 18th century courses can be made to appeal to large numbers of 20th century undergraduates.

"Of that there is no manner  
of doubt, No probable,  
possible shadow of doubt,  
No possible doubt whatever."

## Queries about Newspapers

Fritz Liebert (Yale Univ. Library) asks if any *JNL* reader knows of a file (original or microfilm) in the United States of the *London Public Advertiser* (published under this title from 1753 to 1792). He is especially interested in the year 1786, but can find no record of anything more than a few scattered numbers.

Clarence Tracy (13 Chauncey St., Cambridge, Mass.) writes that he is very anxious to persuade some group to produce a complete-run film of the *Daily Courant*. The trouble is that he has not been able to find anywhere a complete run of the originals. As he puts it, "the file in the Burney Collection is almost entirely complete from the beginning down through 1726, but from 1727 to the end (1735) it has large gaps. Crane and Kaye have little to add, save for a run from 7 July 1731 to 16 Jan. 1733 in the private library of Professor Griffith. Do you or any of your friends know where the gaps may be filled in?" If and when the film could be made it would be a very valuable aid to all of us. So let us institute a search for the missing numbers.

## A Food Parcel

James Sutherland (Queen Mary College, London) calls our attention to an item "of considerable historical interest, being nothing less than what is probably the first letter from an American to England (or rather Ireland) announcing the dispatch of a food parcel." It was addressed to Dean Swift from Philadelphia, 29 March 1729. (Ball. IV. 74)

"Friend Jonathan Swift,

Having been often agreeably amused by thy Tale, etc., etc., and being now loading a small ship for Dublin, I have sent thee a gammon, the product of the wilds of America, which perhaps may not be unacceptable at thy table, since it is only designed to let thee know that thy wit and good parts are here in esteem at this distance from the place of thy residence. Thee need ask no questions who this comes from, since I am a perfect stranger to thee.

The letter was endorsed in Swift's hand: "Received May 22, 1729; Quaker's letter from Philadelphia with a ham."

## Recent Books

Perhaps the most outstanding scholarly production of this year is Harold Williams' new edition of the *Journal to Stella* (merely



mentioned in our last number). This two-volume text of the letters is admirable in every way — beautifully printed in the best Clarendon tradition, with full commentary and index, and a valuable Introduction. Williams gives an excellent concise summary of Swift's early career and his relations with Stella, taking a strong position against acceptance of the old tradition that Stella was Temple's daughter. On the other hand, he takes no definite stand on the marriage question. Of most value for Swift scholars will be the important analysis of the work of the early editors of the *Journal*, the contradiction of Pons' theory concerning the erasures and obliterations, and the reasonable explanation of the "Little Language." Certainly a necessary acquisition for all Augustan scholars!

In contrast, it is difficult to find any justification whatever for B. Acworth's *Swift*, a copy of which has only recently reached us. Acworth appears completely oblivious to all 20th century Swift scholarship, and has very little to contribute critically himself. If you wish to see a thorough demolishing of the book, see Dobree's wonderful review in the *Spectator* for May 7.

*The Legacy of Swift: a Bicentenary Record of St. Patrick's Hospital, Dublin*, edited by M. J. Craig, will interest all Swift scholars. A special exhibition catalogue is included.

Ernest Bernbaum writes of reading the third volume of Paul Van Tieghem's *Le Prérromantisme*, subtitled "La Découverte de Shakespeare sur le Continent," containing much of general 18th century interest.

From F. Cordasco comes word that his *Samuel Richardson: a List of Critical Studies published 1896-1946* is now ready. It may be secured for \$1.00 from the Long Island Univ. Press.

The Univ. of Texas Press is issuing *Jacob Tonson in Ten Letters by and about Him*, edited with an introductory essay and notes by Sarah L. C. Clapp.

E. S. de Beer points out the importance of the Index to the Vertue Note-Books (Walpole Society), invaluable as a guide to them, and filled with information about 18th century people whose personalities have not hitherto emerged satisfactorily.

Important books just published in England are Percy A. Scholes' *The Great Dr. Burney*, an illustrated two-volume biography; the Luttrell Society's reprinting of Christopher Smart's *Hymns for the Amusement of Children*; Margaret Barton's *Garrick*. Of lesser importance are Christopher Lloyd's new one-volume selection from

the diary of Fanny Burney and Constantia Maxwell's compilation of *The Wisdom of Dr. Johnson* (various comments chosen from his writings).

### Forthcoming Books

James Sutherland (Queen Mary College, London) is reading page proofs of a book on 18th century poetry. We will all look forward to it eagerly.

Announced for summer publication are J. Harold Wilson's *The Court Wits of the Restoration*; and William Payne's *Index to Defoe's "Review"*. Among books listed for autumn publication are Hoxie Fairchild's 3d volume of *Religious Trends in English Poetry*; William Payne's *The Best of Defoe's "Review,"* (an anthology); and C. A. Miller's *Anecdotes of the Literary Club* (to be published by the Exposition Press, 1 Spruce St., N.Y.).

C. A. Miller (Tower Bldg., Wash., D.C.) read a paper on "Dr. Johnson and Tea" to the Boswell Club in Chicago. This paper, together with two others, "An Evening with the Literary Club" and "Charles James Fox — First Great English Liberal," will be published in pamphlet form. As Miller puts it, "a limited number of copies will be available to interested persons."

Oscar Sherwin (C.C.N.Y.) has just completed a book to be called *Friend of the People: the Social and Literary Importance of John Wesley* and an article "Milton for the Masses: John Wesley's Edition of *Paradise Lost*."

It is good news that Bill Wimsatt is reading page proofs of his book concerned with Dr. Johnson and language, *Philosophic Words*.

We are very glad that finally, after many years, there is to be an English translation (made by Mrs. E. O. Lorimer) of Beljame's celebrated *Le Public et les hommes de lettres en Angleterre, au dix-huitième siècle*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Bonamy Dobrée, it will shortly be published by Kegan Paul.

Joseph Wood Krutch's *Samuel Johnson* is at last announced for British publication in June.

### Johnsonian Articles

Three recent articles we wish to recommend heartily: Maurice Quinlan on the rumor of Johnson's conversion, in the March issue of the *Review of Religion* (an important study of the controversial last hours of the great man); W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and



Margaret H. Wimsatt's "Self-Quotations and Anonymous Quotations in Johnson's Dictionary," in the March *ELH* (posing some fascinating questions concerning the workings of Johnson's mind) [See also Wimsatt's "Johnson's Treatment of Bolingbroke in the Dictionary," *MLR*, Jan. 1948]; and Herman W. Liebert's "This Harmless Drudge," in *The Colophon*, Vol. I, Part 2 (a valuable summary of recent bibliographical discoveries).

Liebert quotes a wonderful note in the 1773 edition of Shakespeare, hitherto unnoticed by Johnsonians, which we can't resist passing on to our readers. In 1765 Johnson had suggested dropping nine words from the text of *Macbeth*, as being possibly the insertions of a player. To this Benjamin Heath in his *Revisal of Shakespeare's Text* had taken exception. In the 1773 edition Johnson replied:

"This note was written before I was fully acquainted with Shakespeare's manner, and I do not now think it of much weight; for though the words, which I was once willing to eject, seem interpolated, I believe they may still be genuine, and added by the authour in his revision. The authour of the *Revisal* cannot admit the measure to be faulty. There is only one foot, he says, put for another. This is one of the effects of literature in minds not naturally perspicacious. Every boy or girl finds the metre imperfect, but the pedant comes to its defense with a tribrachys or an anapaest, and sets it right at once by applying to one language the rules of another. If we may be allowed to change feet, like the old comic writers, it will not be easy to write a line not metrical. To hint this once, is sufficient."

### Some Other Recent Articles

In our last number we failed to mention I. Ehrenpreis's excellent article "Swift's 'Little Language' in the *Journal to Stella*," *SP* for January 1948, Swift enthusiasts may find amusement in the jeu d'esprit of William Pepperall Montague, "Gulliver's Posthumous Travels to Riemann's Land and Lobachevskia" in *Scripta Mathematica* for Sept.-Dec., 1947 (pointed out to us by Dr. H. T. Radin).

Other discussions to be mentioned are: E.K.A. Mackenzie's "Thomas Percy's Great Schemes," *MLR*, January 1948; Dorothy M. Stuart's "'Ossian' Macpherson Revisited," *English*, Spring 1948; T.O. Mabbott's "On the Coinage of Pescenius Niger" *Numismatic Review*, Oct. 1946 (incidentally containing an explanatory note on Pope's *Dunciad*, IV, 369-70); Martin S. Day, "Anstey and

Anapestic Satire in the Late Eighteenth Century," *ELH*, June 1948.

### A Quiz

For any of our readers interested in metrics, Ralph M. Williams (Trinity College) comments: "In his 37th letter to Robert Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins says that the only example of 'sprung rhythm' in the eighteenth century is in two lines from Dyer." Can you spot the lines from Dyer without going to Hopkins's letter? Can you find any other examples of "sprung rhythm" in the eighteenth century?

### An Akenside Exhibition

In May of this year, as part of the 125th anniversary of the founding of Trinity College, Hartford, Conn., the English Dept. sponsored an exhibition of first editions of the poetry of Mark Akenside, largely from the collection of Ralph M. Williams. A mimeographed catalogue of the collection has just been sent to us.

### A Fine Copy of Volume I of Defoe's *Review*

Robert D. Horn (Univ. of Oregon) writes proudly of the acquisition of a copy of Volume I of Defoe's *Review*, complete in all points — title page, Preface, text, the five supplements, Appendix, and Index. He adds: "From Secord's data, it appears to be one of only six or seven such. Furthermore, it is in the original calf binding, and uncut.... I am almost inclined to believe it may be the best, certainly one of the best, surviving copies. Unless Secord's information is incomplete, it appears to be the only copy west of Texas. Harvard and Yale copies are both incomplete, both lacking the Supplements, Appendix, and Contents, and Harvard also lacks the title page and Preface."

### Thomson as Mason

In the *Daily Advertiser* for 13 Sept. 1737 there is the statement that James Thomson, Dr. Armstrong, and others had been admitted free and accepted Masons at a meeting held at Old Man's Coffee House, Charing Cross, with Richard Savage, son of the late Earl Rivers, officiating as Master.